

## Summary of DHS' COVID-19 Response

June 26, 2020

*The following is a chronology of the Department of Human Services' (DHS') response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. DHS is taking a number of steps to ensure the safety of our team members and of those we serve while ensuring continued access to critical services.*

*Before any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the State of Iowa, DHS began analyzing our operations across the agency and conferring with other states. Our leadership team quickly mobilized to assess our emergency response protocols and tailor those plans to this unique pandemic. Things progressed very quickly, as did our response.*

**March 6, 2020:** Director Garcia notified Glenwood Resource Center (GRC) staff of the positive case in Omaha, encouraged good prevention measures, and informed them DHS was exploring flexibility in our approach to human resources, including sick leave policy.

**March 10, 2020:** Director Garcia notified all DHS staff which:

- Provided protocols for potential exposure
- Limited all non-essential business travel
- Encouraged suspending personal travel
- Provided detail on sick leave
- Notified staff of coming visitor restrictions at our facilities
- Provided good prevention measures

**March 11, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid published an [Informational Letter \(IL\) regarding billing services related to Coronavirus and COVID-19](#).

**March 12, 2020:** DHS notified guardians and loved ones of visitor restrictions to all DHS facilities. The message indicated all visitors will be screened for illness and risk to previous exposure, and those permitted entry will be asked to take further precautionary measures to mitigate risk of potential exposure.

**March 12, 2020:** DHS distributed a supervisor toolkit, which provided guidance on:

- Business travel
- Personal travel
- Reporting potential exposure
- Staff leave
- Telecommuting
- Insurance coverage
- Visiting clients at home or in person.
  - This included a screening checklist for social workers conducting home visits.

**March 13, 2020:** DHS notified guardians and loved ones that we've suspended all in-person visitation, with limited exception.

**March 13, 2020:** Director Garcia emailed all DHS staff to notify them of initial steps taken to protect those we serve and our team.

**March 14, 2020:** DHS posted childcare guidance on the agency website. Childcare Resource and Referral (CCR&R) also sent this guidance to childcare providers via email.

**March 14, 2020:** DHS announced measures to ensure access to childcare and additional financial and operational assistance to childcare providers.

**March 14, 2020:** Director Garcia emailed Des Moines Area and Dallas county team members to notify them of community-spread of COVID-19 and to inform them that our leadership team was meeting on March 15, 2020, to work through multiple contingency plans.

**March 15, 2020:** Director Garcia emailed Des Moines Area and Dallas county team members to notify them that we are shifting to telework due to community-spread of COVID-19.

**March 15, 2020:** Director Garcia emailed all DHS staff to notify them of our shift to telework in phases based on location and risk.

**March 15, 2020:** DHS began screening all Mental Health and Disability (MHDS) facility patients for COVID-19 including signs and symptoms, which includes daily temperature checks.

**March 16, 2020:** Director Garcia emailed all DHS staff with updated information on our travel and leave policy. DHS updated the supervisor toolkit (version 2) with additional guidance on our travel and leave policy.

**March 16, 2020:** DHS issued COVID-19 guidance on home visitation and group care settings.

**March 16, 2020:** DHS issued a [press release](#) announcing measures to protect team members and mitigate spread, while ensuring continued services to Iowans.

**March 17, 2020:** DHS held an all-county phone call to request information to assess the need for childcare for essential workforce. DHS notified the counties that we are working to stand up alternative childcare sites for essential workforce.

Essential workforce includes:

- All hospital staff;
- All healthcare providers in private practice and all direct care staff;
- Staff who provide critical government infrastructure: examples include: social services, child protection services, public health officials, tax collection, corrections and other public safety;
- Emergency responders;
- Food service workers, including grocery store staff and limited restaurant staff to include supporting take-away options; and

- Others as approved by the Director of Human Services.

DHS issued a press release announcing [DHS Submitting Federal Waivers to Ensure Continued Access to Medical Assistance and Flexibility to Meet the Needs of Iowans](#).

DHS updated the supervisor toolkit (version 3) with additional guidance on travel, sick leave and congregate meal settings.

DHS issued a compilation of Adult, Children and Family Services (ACFS) guidance in response to COVID-19.

DHS implemented policy changes for Childcare Assistance (CCA) and the Iowa Quality Rating System that allows billing of additional absence days per month and extension of quality ratings for currently rated childcare programs.

**March 18, 2020:** DHS procured 300 non-contact, infrared body thermometers for distribution to facilities, local offices, and central office sites.

DHS published a [COVID-19 DHS Resources webpage](#) to gather all DHS COVID-19 materials in one place for all stakeholders. DHS issued guidance for social workers and contractors related to drug testing scattered-site supervised apartment living, dependent adult assessment/evaluation, ongoing adult services and in-home health related care (IHHRC).

Iowa Medicaid submitted an emergency Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) state plan amendment (SPA) to extend eligibility to CHIP members beyond their certification period, provide additional time for CHIP members to submit renewal or verification materials, and waive the eligibility verification requirements. Iowa Medicaid submitted our first 1135 waiver request to allow flexibility around 24-hour nursing in hospitals, to allow flexibility in staffing, care and housing at Intermediate Care Facilities for the Intellectually Disabled (ICF/ID), to allow flexibility to nursing facilities (NF) around admission screenings and to allow NF extra time to complete re-certification and to submit plans of correction. Iowa submitted an 1115 waiver request to allow continued eligibility for CHIP members who age out during the national emergency, allow continuous eligibility for all Medicaid enrollees, and expand home delivered meals services.

**March 19, 2020:** DHS issued two policy guidance statements to staff: Hoover [central office] Mail Routing Services and Electronic Signature Process.

Iowa Medicaid published an [IL with updated information regarding billing services related to Coronavirus and COVID-19](#).

DHS procured 114 cellular phones and 85 MiFi units to facilitate staff work from home capabilities.

**March 19, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid announced program updates related to COVID-19 in the Medicaid e-News stakeholder newsletter.

**March 20, 2020:** DHS issued updated childcare guidance. This updated guidance focused on hygiene and cleanliness, health, social distancing and reporting. It also asked all parents who are able to keep their kids home to do so, and to also limit childcare settings to 10 per room.

Iowa Medicaid began publishing daily updates to the COVID-19 provider tool kit with frequently asked questions (FAQs).

DHS issued COVID-19 guidance on caseworker visits with children in foster care.

The DHS Disaster Behavioral Health Response Team (DBHRT) began making calls to emergency managers across the state and people who have identified themselves with needs related to anxiety and special needs. Information about DBHRT is shared with the Homeland Security Emergency Management and Emergency Management staff as appropriate.

**March 21: 2020:** DHS published a new childcare locator map, which is updated daily to assist essential workforce in finding safe, quality childcare.

DHS issued guidance in response to COVID-19 on group care, shelter, psychiatric mental institutes for children (PMIC), residential-based supportive community living (RBSCL) and juvenile detention. DHS also issued FAQs for residential settings in response to COVID-19.

**March 22: 2020:** DHS and the Governor announced, via press conference, new efforts to launch emergency childcare settings for essential workforce. DHS worked closely with the Department of Education along with all 99 counties, local superintendents, health systems and local community partners to assess need and identify site locations. DHS developed a streamlined process to stand up sites and assist them.

DHS published a webpage with forms and information to assist communities in establishing temporary emergency childcare sites.

**March 23: 2020:** DHS submitted waivers to the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to request flexibility in the Food Assistance program.

**March 25, 2020:** DHS drew additional federal funding for increased FMAP, as allowed under (Families First Coronavirus Response Act: H.R. 6201):

- \$64,310,628.67 for Title XIX;
- \$ 1,754,465.85 for CHIP;
- \$ 52,997.47 for Money Follows the Person

Iowa Medicaid created a dedicated COVID-19 email account to gather and track provider inquiries. Iowa Medicaid received CMS approval of our first 1135 waiver. Iowa Medicaid submitted a Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Appendix K waiver request to:

- allow expanded home delivered meals, homemaker and companion services to all HCBS waiver members,
- remove limitations on respite care,
- allow providers to exceed service limitations, allow flexibilities for member reassessments and reevaluations, prior authorizations and electronic signatures,

- allow for parents and family members to provide direct services, if necessary, allow payment for services to support a HCBS member when necessary supports are needed for care in a hospital or short stay NF, and allow for expanded settings for HCBS.

DHS issued updated guidance on home visitation and contact for child welfare family-centered services. The updated guidance focused on contact requirements for specific child welfare services, family team decision-making meetings, and family interactions. The updated guidance also included HIPAA compliant teleconferencing methods.

**March 26: 2020:** DHS notified all DHS facility staff and all DHS social workers they must be tested for COVID-19 if they have fever or emerging cough per updated guidance from IDPH.

**March 26 and 27, 2020:** DHS staff attended HSEMD webinars, *Public Assistance Applicant Briefing*, in preparation for FEMA-4483-DR public assistance program funding request.

Iowa Medicaid hosted provider conference calls to answer questions.

**March 27, 2020:** DHS issued a press release announcing [DHS Takes Multiple Steps to Ensure Food Security, Including New Online Options Through Amazon and Walmart](#). DHS and the Department of Corrections (DOC) reached an agreement to pause admissions and discharges to the Civil Commitment Unit for Sexual Offenders (CCUSO).

DHS issued COVID-19 guidance on family interactions for children in foster care.

**March 30, 2020:** DHS issued updated guidance on home visitation and contact for child welfare family-centered services. The updated guidance included steps to take if have a fever of 100.4 or above or an emerging cough.

**March 31, 2020:** Director Garcia sent an all staff email to emphasize the importance of communication and to highlight our efforts to protect our team.

DHS began hosting twice-weekly conference calls with legislators and legislative staff to provide ongoing updates to our COVID-19 response.

Iowa Medicaid published an [IL regarding Pharmacy Billing Services Related to Coronavirus and COVID-19](#). Iowa Medicaid received approval of the HCBS Appendix K waiver.

**March 31 – April 1, 2020:** DHS procures 92 gallons of hand sanitizer, procedural masks, N-95 masks, and face shields for distribution to facilities, field and other frontline staff.

**April 1, 2020:** DHS announces [partnership with Cedar Ridge Distillery and the Department of Corrections to provide hand sanitizer to frontline DHS staff and childcare providers](#).

Iowa Medicaid submitted a second 1135 waiver request to modify deadlines for NF resident assessments, suspend the two-week aide supervision requirement by a registered nurse (RN), suspend supervision of hospice aides by an RN every 14 days; and waive mandatory CPR training for Psychiatric Medical Institutions for Children (PMIC) and hospitals.

Iowa Medicaid submitted a COVID Disaster SPA request to:

- suspend cost-sharing for all members and suspend premiums, allow coverage of COVID-19 testing for uninsured individuals,
- expand presumptive eligibility determinations made by hospitals,
- allow flexibilities on residency when an individual is evacuated for medical reasons related to disaster or otherwise absent from the state due to the disaster with intent to return to Iowa;
- add HCBS service availability of meals, companion, homemaker and case management direct services;
- expand HCBS service settings and
- allow retainer payments for habilitation members.

**April 2, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid published an [IL regarding DHS waivers and frequently asked questions \(FAQs\) regarding COVID-19](#) and an [IL with updates on billing services for telehealth related to Coronavirus and COVID-19](#).

**April 3, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**April 4, 2020:** DHS held a family town hall for Glenwood Resource Center (GRC) families and loved ones. Director Garcia provided a detailed update on our COVID-19 response. Families were appreciative and understanding of the steps we've taken.

**April 6, 2020:** DHS published tips and resources for teens in foster care in response to COVID-19 on the DHS website.

**April 7, 2020:** Director Garcia sent an all staff email to address the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and the associated sick leave and expanded family and medical leave. This email informed staff that all of DHS is exempted from these expanded benefits.

DHS issued letters to foster parents, social workers, and child welfare service contractors. These letters reflected a transition to virtual options for family interactions, with exception, in response to COVID-19.

The Attorney General's (AG's) office has been partnering with DHS staff to host discussions on reasonable efforts look like during the pandemic. Ellen Ramsey-Kacena drafted model motions and proposed orders for virtual visitation and worked with the AG's Prosecuting Attorney Training Consortium (PATC) to disseminate these to county attorneys.

**April 8, 2020:** DHS issued a letter to child welfare service contractors providing Safety Plan Services and Family Safety, Risk, and Permanency (FSRP) Services. The letter provided guidance on service delivery regarding in-person contact and transitioning, with exception to videoconferencing methods.

DHS updated guidance for group settings and FAQ's for residential settings to reflect the transition to virtual options for family interactions, with some exceptions.

**April 9, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid published an [IL regarding the expansion of home-delivered meals, homemaker and companion services](#) during COVID-19. Iowa Medicaid updated the online list of Medicaid flexibilities requested in response to COVID-19 to include the implementation date or status of each request.

**April 10, 2020:** Director Garcia emailed a video message to all DHS staff to offer words of encouragement and to encourage family time over the weekend.

Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**April 13, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid published a webpage for members with eligibility criteria for, and information on how to access, expanded home-delivered meals, homemaker and companion services.

**April 14, 2020:** DBHRT conducted stress management and self-care Zoom sessions. Two sessions were conducted for Homeland Security Emergency Management staff.

**April 15, 2020:** The DHS COVID-19 Child Support FAQs were updated to reflect the latest information on child support being withheld from pandemic unemployment benefits.

DHS sent a rapid response strike team to Tama, IA for community assistance. NOTE: Work is continuing on expanding this service.

**April 16, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid published an [IL regarding prior authorizations \(PAs\), claims filing for managed care](#) during COVID-19.

DBHRT conducted a stress management and self-care Zoom session for Homeland Security Emergency Management staff, IDPH staff and Governor's Office staff.

**April 17, 2020:** DHS issued guidance on caring for masks in the 'Inside DHS' staff newsletter. This provided details on the types of masks distributed to DHS staff and how to properly clean and store them.

All DHS facilities began requiring the use of masks (surgical and/or cloth) for all employees working with patients and/or on the wards, units, houses and cottages.

Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**April 18, 2020:** The DHS targeted case management (TCM) team began providing direct support to the State's contact tracing efforts.

**April 20, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid issued Medicaid income guidance to address questions regarding the impact of stimulus payments on client participation at facilities. The stimulus payment will not be counted as income subject to client participation. Iowa Medicaid publicly presented information on our COVID-19 efforts at the Hawki Board meeting.

**April 21, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid announced program updates related to COVID-19 in the Medicaid e-News stakeholder newsletter.

**April 22 and 23, 2020:** DHS nurses conducted testing for long-term care facility staff in the Tama area at the Toledo Juvenile Home. DHS provided the facility and logistical assistance.

DHS received three federal waivers from the Office of Child Care regarding its Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) operations. The waivers address annual inspections, federal background checks, and copayments from families receiving CCA.

**April 24, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid received approval of emergency CHIP SPA.

**April 24, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**April 27, 2020:** DHS announced the first resident to presumptively test positive at any of DHS' six facilities.

**May 1, 2020:** The resident at WRC who had presumptively tested positive for COVID-19 was confirmed to be positive. Two additional residents at WRC tested positive. To protect other residents in the home, WRC residents who test positive are transitioned to another house on campus designated for positive cases. As their symptoms improve and they meet specific criteria, they will transition to a step down house before returning to their primary residence. Ongoing updates on testing data at our facilities and a summary of our response specific to our facilities can be found [here](#).

**May 1, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**May 5, 2020:** DHS [announced additional support for childcare providers](#). The federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provides \$3.5 billion in discretionary funding for the Childcare and Development Block Grant, also known as the Childcare Development Fund (CCDF). DHS received a supplemental allocation of \$31.9M on April 14, 2020, and developed a [COVID-19 Childcare Sustainability Plan](#) to dispense these funds to support childcare providers during the pandemic.

DHS' COVID-19 Childcare Sustainability Plan will use CARES Act funds to:

- Provide a monthly stipend of \$2,000 to open licensed centers and \$500 to open registered homes,
- Provide an additional monthly stipend of \$2,000 to licensed centers and \$500 to registered homes providing a 25 percent discount to essential services personnel,
- Pay providers for unlimited absences and full-day care for school-age children,
- Provide hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies directly to providers,
- Cover the cost of background checks for employees at temporary emergency sites,
- Waive CCA family co-pays and provide full tuition amounts to providers serving CCA families,
- Provide a rejuvenation grant to providers who have closed to assist them in re-opening.

**May 5, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid received approval of its second 1135 waiver.

**May 6, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid published an [IL regarding 2020 Civil Money Penalty \(CMP\) grants for communicative technology during COVID-19](#). Iowa Medicaid sends CARES Act Medicaid and CHIP Provider Distribution information to CMS. CMS will use this information to determine payments to Medicaid specific providers in Iowa.

**May 8, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**May 11, 2020:** DHS issued a [press release](#) announcing additional financial support for group care and shelter care providers. The federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided additional funds to the State of Iowa to prevent, prepare for and respond to the pandemic.

DHS' COVID-19 Child Welfare Support Plan will use CARES Act funds to:

- Pay group and shelter providers a supplemental daily rate.
- Provide technology grants to providers who give direct support to parents and children who are in foster care or at risk of foster care placement.
- Provide a one-time \$500 payment to foster parents who have a child placed in their home who is directly impacted by COVID-19.

**May 12, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid publicly presented information on our COVID-19 efforts at Medical Assistance Advisory Council (MAAC) meeting.

**May 13, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid publicly presented information on our COVID-19 efforts at Council on Human Services meeting.

**May 14, 2020:** Since the May 6 announcement of CMP grants funding for communicative technology during COVID-19, Iowa Medicaid had approved 53 applications (65 facilities) for more than \$148,000.

**May 15, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**May 15, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid published an IL [regarding HCBS Retainer Payments](#)

**May 18, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid announced program updates related to COVID-19 in the Medicaid e-News stakeholder newsletter. Iowa Medicaid received approval of Disaster SPA 20-008.

**May 22, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**May 27, 2020:** DHS launches [Covid Recovery Iowa](#), a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funded program offering free counseling to any Iowan who has been affected, in any way, by the COVID-19 public health emergency. DHS contracted with five providers throughout the state to provide counseling, virtual activities, referrals and help finding resources.

**May 29, 2020:** DHS issued a [press release](#) announcing submission another federal waiver to Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) to ensure continued expanded access to food. This federal waiver allows for continued increased benefits for current and newly eligible applicants. DHS increased June Food Assistance benefits to the maximum allowable amount per household. If a household was not already receiving the maximum amount for June, the additional benefits were added to their EBT card with their normal monthly benefits.

**May 29, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**June 1, 2020:** The [application for COVID-19 Testing Coverage](#) is posted on the DHS website.

**June 2, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid published an IL [regarding COVID-19 Testing Available to Uninsured Individuals](#).

**June 5, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**June 9, 2020:** Collection Services Center distributed a total of \$8,199,174.16 to families from federal stimulus (after appeals timelines have expired) and regular child support processing. This is the largest distribution ever recorded (previous record was just over \$3 million).

**June 12, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**June 15, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid publicly presented information on our COVID-19 efforts at Hawki Board meeting.

**June 18, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid announced program updates related to COVID-19 in the Medicaid e-News stakeholder newsletter. Iowa Medicaid shared information with providers about additional distributions from the federal Provider Relief Fund to eligible Medicaid and CHIP providers.

**June 19, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.

**June 26, 2020:** Iowa Medicaid hosted a provider conference call to answer questions.